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**Afghanistan military family reunion**

**ZABUL, Afghanistan-** With increased focus on supporting military families by the First Lady Michelle Obama and Dr. Jill Biden, our families can even be found among our service members here in Afghanistan. Two sisters recently had a brief, six hour reunion at Forward Operation Base Lagman on April 18 after not seeing each other in over four years. Maj. Veronika Reynolds and Spc. Raven Fitzgerald from Portland, Oregon were grateful for the time they got to spend together.

Maj. Reynolds serves as the Aviation Officer for Combined Team Zabul in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Stryker Cavalry Regiment. She plans and coordinates all air movement in the Province. Reynolds deployed from Vilseck, Germany and was a prior enlisted Soldier in the aviation field. She fell in love with helicopters during a routine maintenance flight and went on to become a UH-60, Blackhawk pilot. This is her second deployment and first one to Afghanistan. She has been in the military for 19 years.

“I really enjoy the military and being a Blackhawk pilot. I am living the dream and having this opportunity to see my sister so many miles from home makes this reunion even more special,” said Reynolds.

Spc. Raven Fitzgerald is in 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, 101<sup>st</sup> Aviation Regiment as a flight operations specialist and deployed out of Fort Campbell, Kentucky. Fitzgerald enjoys her job and has to verify each pilot has an evasion action plan in case of emergencies and tracks all flight hours. Fitzgerald is based out of Tarin Kot at Camp Cole with Combined Team Uruzgan and joined the Army a little over four years ago.

“This is my first deployment. I joined the Army because of my sister and you can say that she inspired me to go into the Aviation field,” said Fitzgerald.

“I am really lucky to be at Tarin Kot, because it is spacious and surrounded by mountains. It is really, very beautiful. I think that Lagman is pretty crowded and small. It makes me appreciate Tarin Kot more. I wasn’t expecting a room to myself and was prepared for much worse,” continued Fitzgerald.

The daughters of Phillip and Linda Huddleston, who still live in Portland, are part of a large family of 12 with 5 sisters and 5 brothers. Their father, Phillip Huddleston, is a retired Chief Warrant Officer 3 meteorologist and is no stranger to the military. But despite the turmoil of military life, their parents have been married for 48 years.

The sisters caught up on family and common interests such as their children. Both have sons. Reynolds has a son, Bobby, who is 19 months old and Fitzgerald has a son, Anthony, who is three years old. They also talked about their favorite team NBA team, the Trailblazers. The reunion was short but a welcome reprieve from the daily operations of deployed life.

The sacrifices made by many service members don’t just include women sacrificing their time taking care of children, but also women deployed away from their children. Military families don’t fit into

a standard mold and sometimes mothers deploy leaving their husbands to take care of the children. If both spouses are in the military, both can be deployed at the same time causing parents to create a plan to leave their loved ones with their grandparents or other family members. It is just part of the sacrifices that all military families have to make to be our heroes on the home front.



Deployed sisters, Maj. Veronika Reynolds and Spc. Raven Fitzgerald are having a little fun catching up after four years at a 6 hour reunion on forward operation base Lagman on April 18. (Photo by: Maj. Robert Hoover)